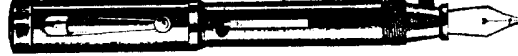


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The man who tried to shut down the national poverty program for President Nixon is considering running for the Senate from Massachusetts—as a Democrat.

Howard Phillips, 37, told reporters at a breakfast here Thursday that he's "90 percent sure" he'll enter the September Democratic primary for the seat held by Republican Edward Brooke. Phillips will get the results of a poll by fellow conservative Vern Kennedy of Alexandria, La., this Thursday and will decide by the first week in June, he said.

Phillips, as acting director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, tried to dismantle the agency. He resigned under pressure in 1973. He claims he has been a Democrat since 1974.

Phillips' assumption is this: the other candidates in the Democratic primary will be liberals; he thinks he can win a plurality—and thus the nomination—by running on conservative issues.

The addition of Phillips would further enliven a contest one candidate has dubbed "a sequel to Looney-Tunes Presents."

Elaine Noble, the only avowed lesbian state legislator in the nation and one of the Democratic candidates, made the characterization last week at a press conference called to inform an already bewildered press corps that she is still running for the Senate.

"I need to say that today because for the week past—and perhaps the week ahead—there is confusion about who's running and who's not, and for what, and why, and perhaps the wherefore," she said.

Noble, never known to pull her punches, took off the gloves in an attack on Lt. Gov. Thomas P. O'Neill III, son of the House speaker, who caused a furor by considering running against Noble and then announcing he wouldn't. "A lot of people are all dressed up with no place to go," she quipped.

And on the entry of Rep. Paul Tsongas (D-Mass.) into the race, she said, "I don't care if Genghis Khan is in the race, I'm still running."